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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/16/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [CM](#) [KCOR](#) [PINR](#)
SUBJECT: CAMEROON OPPOSITION LEADER ON ELECTIONS,
POSSIBILITY FOR UNREST

REF: A. YAOUNDE 333

[1](#)B. YAOUNDE 445
[1](#)C. YAOUNDE 441

Classified By: P/E Chief Katherine Brucker, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)
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Summary

[1](#)1. (SBU) Bernard "Ben" Muna, head of the newly formed opposition coalition Alliance of Progressive Forces told Charge April 16 that he feared "generalized violence" if the July legislative and municipal elections are fraught with fraud. Pointing to violence that has broken out recently among ruling party (Cameroon Peoples Democratic Movement, CPDM) supporters, Muna asked rhetorically, "if CPDM supporters are fed up, what about everybody else?" While we continue to believe that apathy and resignation will lead most Cameroonians to accept whatever results the elections produce, we are sensitive to the fact that fear of unrest is foremost among the concerns of a growing number of political leaders. End Summary.

CPDM Violence, Foreshadowing More?

[1](#)2. (SBU) Ben Muna, formerly of the Social Democratic Front and now head of the Alliance of Progressive Forces (AFP), an opposition coalition of five parties that is "getting bigger daily" and drawing in disgruntled members of the CPDM, called on Charge April 16 to express his concerns about the potential for unrest should the July legislative and municipal elections go badly. Muna reported that the recent internal elections within the ruling CPDM had prompted violence ranging from fist-fights, killings and the April 6 burning of the Chief's palace in Bafia, in the Center Province. "If CPDM supporters are fed up," Muna asked, "what about everybody else?"

[1](#)3. (C) Elaborating on why he thinks there is a risk of violence, Muna said "the people have given President Biya ample chances to improve the country, and he has failed." He characterized Prime Minister Inoni's April 11 meeting with

political parties to encourage registration as too little, too late. Voter registration (which will likely close on or about April 21) continues to be a problem, he said, and it seems unlikely that the Government of Cameroon (GRC) will reach its goal of registering 7-8 million voters (some 4 million were estimated to be on the list for the 2004 election). "Massive registration" is needed to instill confidence in the process, he said, but the numbers are actually dropping in areas "not favorable to the CPDM," he alleged. (Comment: While falling registration numbers could legitimately reflect efforts to remove multiple entries and correct other registration errors, as noted in Ref. A, years of selective registration and disappearing voter cards will lead Cameroonians to suspect fraud in everything that appears to run contrary to the expected. End Comment)

Election Timing

¶4. (C) Muna said there had been "some hints" at the April 11 meeting with the Prime Minister that the GRC has not ruled out postponing the (anticipated) July elections to allow more time for voter registration. Still, he mused, more voters would not be in the CPDM's interest, as they would most likely be opposition supporters. (Comment: While we have no way of knowing what signals were sent in the meeting with the PM, Muna's impression runs counter to President Biya's April 9 message to the Ambassador (Ref. B) that elections would be held in July, most likely on July 22. End Comment)

Prospects for Fraud

¶5. (SBU) Muna lamented that "massive poverty" in Cameroon, coupled with the way elections are organized, makes poll workers vulnerable to corruption. "With what the CPDM has stolen," he said, "it can pay off all the people it needs to." Polling places in rural areas are especially easy targets, he said, as those manning the voting bureaus often are scarcely able to provide for their own needs. For the equivalent of a few dollars, vote-riggers can send the staff off to lunch (which many could not afford otherwise) and use their absence to remove ballots or stuff boxes. In some instances, he claimed, people have showed up with fully prepared ballot boxes and simply switched them with those at the polling station.

¶6. (U) Muna said he and the AFP were urging people to resist the temptation of abandoning the polling stations in favor of a meal. The message: "You have only one day to go hungry for free and fair elections in Cameroon. If you let yourself be bought off, you and your children will be hungry for the next five years."

Is there any hope?

¶7. (U) Muna outlined several things that would improve the electoral process. "Massive registration" and high voter turnout are critical, he said, if for no other reason than to give people an informed basis for contesting the results. Truly indelible ink is imperative to guard against multiple voting (though in principle, the computerized voter lists should prevent this from happening). Voter registration lists should be posted at the polling stations well in advance, he argued, so people can confirm their registration and know where to collect their voter cards. As for the 2011 presidential election, Muna said the international community would have to be "fully implicated" in the entire process (from registration through vote counting) to give Cameroonians any assurance of a free and fair vote. Otherwise, he warned, "it will be a disaster with violence."

Comment

¶8. (C) Muna's comments reinforce the almost total lack of faith Cameroonians have in the government's ability or willingness to run credible elections. The combination of bureaucratic ineptitude and overt meddling in the registration process has dissuaded many from even trying, and Cameroon's history of poor elections has people pre-disposed to expect the worst in everything. Predictions of election-related unrest have been made to us primarily by Muna and his former SDF colleagues; we suspect this stems in part from their experience in 1992 when violence broke out in the North West province after Biya was declared the winner in an election many believe SDF presidential candidate John Fru Ndi had won. As noted in Ref. C, we are inclined to believe

that even disappointed Cameroonians will accept the election results, as experience has given them little reason to hope for -- and less reason to expect -- real change. End Comment.
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